

Diary Entry by the President Eisenhower

Washington , March 13, 1956 .

Conversation with Acting Secretary of State Herbert Hoover, Jr.
and Robert B. Anderson (afternoon of March 12, 1956)

Late in the afternoon Mr. Anderson returned from the Mid East, where he has been serving as my personal representative in an attempt to bring about some kind of rapprochement between Egypt and Israel. This was the second trip he has made into this area.

He made no progress whatsoever in our basic purpose of arranging some kind of meeting between Egyptian officials and the Israelites. Nasser proved to be a complete stumbling block. He is apparently seeking to be acknowledged as the political leader of the Arab world.

In reaching for this, Nasser has a number of fears. First of all, he fears the military junta that placed him in power, which is extremist in its position to Israel. Next he fears creating any antagonism toward himself on the part of the Egyptian people; he constantly cites the fate of King Farouk. Because he wants to be the most popular man in all the Arab world, he also has to consider public opinion in each of the other countries. The result is that he finally concludes he should take no action whatsoever—rather he should just make speeches, all of which must breathe defiance of Israel.

On the other side, the Israel officials are anxious to talk with Egypt, but they are

completely adamant in their attitude of making no concessions whatsoever in order to obtain a peace. Their general slogan is “not one inch of ground,” and their incessant demand is for arms. Of course, they could get arms at lower prices from almost any European nation, but they want the arms from us because they feel that in this case they have made us a virtual ally in any trouble they might get into in the region.

Public opinion on both sides is inflamed and the chances for peaceful settlement seem remote.

To both Ben-Gurion and Nasser, Anderson held out every pledge of assistance and association that the United States could logically make in return for a genuine effort on the part of both to obtain a peace.

There is, of course, no easy answer. The oil of the Arab world has grown increasingly important to all of Europe. The economy of European countries would collapse if those oil supplies were cut off. [Page 343]If the economy of Europe would collapse, the United States would be in a situation of which the difficulty could scarcely be exaggerated.

On the other hand, Israel, a tiny nation, surrounded by enemies, is nevertheless one that we have recognized—and on top of this, that has a very strong position in the heart and emotions of the Western world because of the tragic suffering of the Jews throughout twenty-five hundred years of history.

It begins to look to me as though our best move is to prevent any concerted action on the part of the Arab States. Specifically I think we can hold Libya to our side through a reasonable amount of help to that impoverished nation, and we have an excellent chance of winning Saudi Arabia to our side if we can get Britain to go along with us. Britain would, of course, have to make certain territorial concessions and this she might object to violently. If Saudi Arabia and Libya were our staunch friends, Egypt could scarcely continue intimate association with the Soviets, and certainly Egypt would no longer be regarded as a leader of the Arab world.

Hoover, Anderson and I discussed all kinds of possibilities of which the above are mere examples. The emotional tensions in the area are such as to cast doubt on the validity of any proposed suggestion. Even the Jordan River Plan, which would be of tremendous economic advantage to both sides in this quarrel, has really been rejected by both because of these tensions. It is a very sorry situation.

Source: Eisenhower Library, Whitman File, Eisenhower Diaries. Secret.

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